

DPI VISTA PROJECT



VISTA IMPACT SUMMARY JULY 2010

The goal of the DPI VISTA Project is to build capacity for family involvement in low-income schools and communities by implementing a research-based, sustainable process for partnerships. From the research (Epstein, et.al), we know that positive effects for the entire community result from meaningful family involvement including:

FOR LOW-INCOME STUDENTS

- Increased enrollment in more challenging academic programs
- More classes passed
- Better attendance, better social skills

FOR LOW-INCOME FAMILIES

- More support from school and other parents
- Increased feeling of ownership of school

- Improved awareness of student progress

FOR TEACHERS AND STAFF

- More respect for families' strengths and efforts
- Heightened readiness to involve families in new ways
- Increased satisfaction with family involvement and support

Feedback from Wisconsin DPI VISTA project sites has shown that in general, schools, districts, and community agencies hosting VISTA members are more likely to:

1. Reach low-income families in more meaningful ways
2. Have the time to develop community partnerships
3. Link low-income families to their children's learning
4. Apply for grants related to family partnerships
5. Develop effective communication tools for families and the community
6. Recruit, train, and support volunteers
7. Receive high quality training and professional development

The DPI VISTA Project provides eligible schools and community organizations with three valuable resources:

- **FULL-TIME VISTA MEMBER** (up to 3 years to develop and sustain partnership practices)
- **TRAININGS** (on developing and creating a framework for effective partnership practices)
- **CONNECTIONS AND RESOURCES** (from the DPI and from a network of hundreds of other Partnership Schools)

The DPI supports up to twenty VISTA members per year throughout Wisconsin at schools and community based organizations who serve a high proportion of low-income students.

WHAT IS AMERICORPS*VISTA?

Authorized originally in 1964 by the Economic Opportunity Act, the federal program has provided full-time volunteers to thousands of low-income communities across the nation to address a multitude of problems as defined by those communities.

Nearly 6,000 AmeriCorps*VISTA (Volunteers In Service To America) members serve in hundreds of non-profit and public agencies throughout the country. Known also as the "domestic Peace Corps," AmeriCorps*VISTA is a national service program that seeks to eliminate poverty by setting up and expanding sustainable projects that impact the lives of those being served.

THE MISSION OF AMERICORPS*VISTA

To strengthen and supplement efforts to eliminate and alleviate poverty in the United States by encouraging and enabling persons from all walks of life, all geographic areas, and all age groups, including low-income individuals to perform meaningful and constructive volunteer service in agencies, institutions, and situations where the application of human talent and dedication may assist in the solution of poverty and poverty-related problems to generate the commitment of private sector resources, to encourage volunteer service at the local level, and to strengthen local agencies and organizations to carry out the purpose of the program (42 U.S.C. 4951)

DPI VISTA PROJECT DESCRIPTION

Under our grant, the Department of Public Instruction currently supports 20 AmeriCorps*VISTA members whose sites span the whole state of Wisconsin. These sites serve a high proportion of low-income families.

The grant, administered by DPI's Community Learning and Partnerships Team, is to support the VISTA members in enhancing school or community based agency partnerships with their communities.

The VISTA and the site's Action Team (a group of representatives of the site community) will draw on the resources of the community, the DPI, and the National Network of Partnership Schools (NNPS) to guide the development and implementation of partnership practices to reach low income families. Hundreds of such promising practices have been designed and implemented in schools and organizations around the country and have been collected by NNPS, of which each site is a member. These practices may involve the recruitment and

maintenance of volunteers, the enhancement of family center resources, the implementation of service-learning projects, the incorporation of parents in decision making, or the design of effective communication tools, to name a few.

WHAT IMPACT DOES A DPI VISTA HAVE?

During the summer of 2009, VISTA members and project staff reached out to former VISTA to conduct surveys on their experiences with our program and their VISTA members. Evaluation of former sites will continue in the 2010-2011 school year.

- All respondents indicated that the VISTA had a positive impact on their school.
- Most respondents indicated that initiatives started by the VISTA are still in place.
- All respondents stated that with the presence of the VISTA, their sites saw an increase in low-income parental attendance at events and programs.
- In general, respondents noted that the VISTA encouraged sites to recognize that a change of *attitude towards low income parents* was necessary to reach families.

WHAT ARE THE RESULTS?

Every year, the National Network of Partnership Schools (NNPS) compiles data on members' partnership progress. Wisconsin schools, districts, and organizations who host VISTA members complete these forms. Results from the 2009-2010 school year are as follows:

SCHOOLS

- ◎ **80%** of schools report making "good" progress on meeting the challenges identified at their school
- ◎ **86%** of schools reported an *improvement* in communicating clearly with all families, including those who do not speak English
- ◎ **100%** of schools report success in recruiting, training and supporting parent/community volunteers
- ◎ **75%** of schools reported **good progress** in preparing teachers to guide families on how to help their children

DISTRICTS

- ◎ **100%** of districts distribute or WILL distribute newsletters to families
- ◎ **75%** of districts conducted trainings for schools on family partnerships and the ATP process
- ◎ **100%** of districts provided workshops for parents to help them build skills
- ◎ **100%** of districts identified a budget to implement family-school-community partnership activities

ORGANIZATIONS

- ◎ **100%** of sites reported distributing "best practices" to schools and districts
- ◎ **75%** of sites conducted staff development on partnerships
- ◎ **66%** of sites wrote and implemented a leadership plan for partnerships in 09-10

SITE LEVEL RESULTS: 2009-2010

- In the **West Allis-West Milwaukee School District**, 100% of survey respondents indicated that the activities offered "exceeded" or "met" expectations for helping families link to student learning.
- In the **West Allis-West Milwaukee School District**, 60% of staff who completed an end of year survey indicated that there were more opportunities for genuine family involvement than the previous year.
- A survey distributed by the **Wausau School District** reported that 100% of parent survey respondents indicated that YES they would attend future events held by the district's new parent education program if offered again in the future
- At the **Indian Community School** in Franklin, 86% of parents said there was "more" opportunity for genuine family involvement in 09-10.
- On a survey distributed by the **School District of Rhinelander**, 100% of respondents said there was the same or more opportunities to connect with their children's learning than the previous year.

VISTA BY THE NUMBERS: VOLUNTEER GENERATION

Since the inaugural year of the VISTA project, volunteer recruitment has been a critical service VISTAs provide to sites. Volunteers help build the capacity of VISTA sites to build stronger and more lasting partnerships.

	02-03	03-04	04-05	05-06	06-07	07-08	08-09	09-10
Number of volunteers recruited	1,528	1,578	1,074	1,636	4,007	1,146	1,642	1,364
Volunteer Hours	22,456	9,025	8,250	6,340	11,468	6,738	11,002	5,521
WI wage equivalent	\$376,362.56	\$151,259.00	\$138,270.00	\$106,258.40	\$192,203.68	\$112,928.88	\$184,393.53	\$98,218.59